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St. Bernard water customers to get monthly bills

By ALEX MARTIN

St. Bernard/Plaquemines bureau

St. Bernard Parish residents will receive water bills monthly instead of every two months beginning March 1.

Parish officials say they hope the move will reduce the financial burden on water customers.

Water Board member Fred Collins, who has advocated monthly billing for more than a year, said the move will not reduce the amount paid to the Water Board, but will spread out the cost to the consumer.

"Times are getting hard and we're trying to help out people in St. Bernard," he said.

Collins' resolution setting up the plan, which passed 3-2 Wednesday, said almost 200 water meters were removed in the last three months because people could not pay their bills.

Under the proposal, water meters will be read bimonthly. In the months when the meter is not read, the Water Board's computer will estimate a bill based on previous water use.

During the months the meter is read, bills will be adjusted according to the amount of water used, compensating for the unmetered bills.

Water Board member Calvin Schenck opposed the plan, saying it may be impractical and expensive. Schenck called for a public hearing before the switch.

He said the procedure would cost the Water Board \$21,000 for office supplies and postage and about \$11,500 for a clerk to help process bills and payments.

Schenck questioned whether there are enough terminals for the computer to perform the tasks. He also said the plan would not necessarily benefit residents.

"Before we pull a meter (out of a home), people have two bills plus 20 days — that's 140 days before we pull the meter," Schenck said. "With the monthly bills, they have 70 days.

"We're talking about nickles here. The average bill is only about \$25."

Board President Philip Deogracias said St. Bernard police jurors told him

that residents asked for the change. Deogracias was angry that Schenck prolonged debate on the resolution.

"The governing body of this parish wants it," Deogracias yelled at Schenck.

Collins, Deogracias and Seraphine Cannizaro voted for the resolution; Schenck and Harry Prieto voted against it.

"Miss Jane Howard, (Water Board secretary) we want monthly billing started March 1; if you have to get the computer people in here and hire a

couple of Kelly Girls, do it" Deogracias said.

"It'll cost you," Schenck said.

"If they (the police jurors) want it, they are going to get it and you can be the hero, Calvin," Deogracias said.

"No question about that," Schenck said. "I will be the hero."

In other action, the board increased the number of watchmen at water plants to protect against contamination. Repeated threats of cyanide poisonings to Louisiana water systems spurred the action.



—Staff photo by Bevil Knapp

Two D.C. lawyers to represent city at N-plant hearings

The City Council hired two Washington lawyers Thursday to represent New Orleans in the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission hearings on the Grand Gulf nuclear power plants.

Clinton A. Vince and Glen L. Ortman, of the Washington firm of Duncan, Allen and Mitchell, will receive \$125 an hour and \$120 an hour.

The council also hired Associated Utilities Services to represent the city on technical engineering aspects of the hearings. Money for the consultants is in a \$200,000 appropriation now before the council.

At issue is the arrangement under which Middle South Utilities, the parent company of New Orleans Public Service Inc. and Louisiana Power & Light Co., will distribute the cost of the \$2.8 billion Grand Gulf 1 plant among its subsidiaries.

NOPSI and LP&L have agreed to cover 26.8 percent and 34.7 percent of the cost of Grand Gulf 1, and to buy equivalent amounts of the power it generates.

The nuclear power is expected to increase electric bills by between 40 percent and 70 percent in the plant's first year of operation, the utilities say.

The Louisiana Public Service Commission has objected to Middle South's decision to let another of its subsidiaries, Arkansas Power and Light Co., withdraw from Grand Gulf, which will increase costs to New Orleans consumers.

New Orleans lawyer Donald Mintz, who represents the city in a suit against United Gas Pipeline, has agreed to open his files on the case to Vince and Ortman, to help the consultants save time, council officials said.

6-vehicle crash on span injures 4, snarls traffic